A Moral Evaluation of Calling Out: Why Calling Out is a Permissible and Valuable Practice

Gabriella Hulsey

A thesis submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Philosophy Department in the School of the Fine Arts and Humanities.

Chapel Hill
2021

Approved by:

Sarah Stroud

Jennifer Morton

Jim Pryor

ABSTRACT

Gabriella Hulsey: A Moral Evaluation of Calling Out: Why Calling Out is a Permissible and Valuable Practice

(Under the direction of Sarah Stroud)

I consider the moral permissibility and value of the practice of calling out. I give a minimal definition of calling out that should be acceptable to critics and proponents of calling out. I consider an argument on which calling out is both permissible and has unique moral value as a mechanism for helping others improve morally. On this positive argument, calling out is valuable because it offers a way for us to help others improve morally. I also present an argument on behalf of critics of calling out, according to which calling out is too harmful for those being called out for calling out to be morally permissible. My project is a positive one: I conclude that because callouts function as moral education mechanisms, calling out plays a role in mitigating culpable and non-culpable ignorance of important morally salient information.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my committee members: Sarah Stroud, Jen Morton, and Jim Pryor. Their feedback, and my conversations with each of them, pushed me to keep sharpening my own thinking and helped me ensure that my writing represented my thinking well. I would also like to thank Sarah, who chaired my committee, for guiding me through this process. I would like to thank my fellow grad students, who were an amazing source of support during this past year. I would also like to thank Larisa Svirsky for helping me get a grasp on the literature on standing to blame. My thanks to the members of r/craftsnark for pointing me toward Emily Gray's comment, and also to Emily Gray for graciously allowing me to use her comment as an example. I would also like to thank my family for supporting me from day one. And to my loving partner Lucas, thank you for answering all of my emergency grammar questions, and for always being a shoulder to lean on.

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1 Introduction

In 2018, popular knitwear designer Caitlin Hunter, who is white, came under fire for selling a sweater pattern named after the Shawnee chief and orator Tecumseh. Hunter was accused of profiting off of the name of an Indigenous person. A comment by Ravelry user Emily Gray sums up the critical reaction:

> Clearly the sweater is well crafted and well thought out — I have no criticism of the craft that went into the garment. However, as a white person who recognizes the systemic, generations-long oppression of Native People, I can't abide by unacknowledged appropriation like this.[1]

Here, Gray is criticizing Hunter for appropriating Tecumseh's name for profit. In modern parlance, we would say that Gray called Hunter out. To call someone out is to publicly criticize them for a moral transgression. The standard critical gloss on calling out is that it's a misguided form of armchair activism or thinly disguised mob rule (Radzik, 2020, 12). The philosophical literature on callouts generally reflects the popular discourse in tone as well as in substance. My project here is to examine the merits of the philosophical arguments.

My focus is on the moral permissibility of calling out as a *practice* rather than on giving an account of what makes a particular callout morally permissible or not. "Calling out" is a (relatively) new name for an old practice.[2] In what follows, I use contemporary cases of callouts

[1] Quoted with permission of Emily Gray. Ravelry does not record exact date and time comments are published. Link to comment (comment number 32): https://www.ravelry.com/patterns/library/tecumseh-2/comments?page=2 - 32.

[2] My layperson's view of history is that there are good historical candidates for calling out, such as the speeches of religious and political prisoners prior to execution, or even Martin Luther nailing his theses to the church door. But I would need to think more about it.

occurring in Western contexts as paradigmatic examples of the target practice, but my analysis is not limited to those contexts.

Plan for Paper

Before going further, I want to introduce the three parties involved in a callout: the person calling out, the person being called out, and witnesses to the callout. The person calling out is the Caller. The person being called out is the Callee. And those who witness the callout are the audience.[3] In the example above, Gray is the Caller, Hunter is the Callee, and other Ravelry users fill out the audience.

In what follows, I consider arguments for and against the practice of calling out. My project is positive: I argue that calling out is morally permissible *and* morally valuable. Section 2 covers my minimal definition of calling out and distinguishes calling out from three adjacent practices. In Section 3, I argue that callouts are morally valuable as a moral education mechanism; two objections are raised, and replies considered. In Section 4, I present an argument, which I later reject, that the harms of callouts outweigh any benefits they may confer. In Section 5, I explain that calling out is a morally valuable practice because it allows people who are usually silenced to harness the ampliative power of the audience's endorsement so that their moral criticisms reach the Callee.

2 Calling Out: What It Is and Is Not

Wherever we stand on the moral permissibility of calling out, there are three essential features for any definition of the practice of calling out:

[3] The audience does not include the Caller or the Callee, it consists of third parties.

1. *Callouts Contain a Negative Moral Judgment*: Callouts assert a negative moral judgment. The moral judgment attaches to a specific action which (allegedly) instantiates a moral transgression. By "moral transgression," I mean that the action violated a moral norm.

2. *Calling Out is Public*: Callouts are performed in public and have an audience. The presence of an audience is crucial to the benefits *and* the harms of calling out. The minimum audience size is one person (who is not the Caller or the Callee). In general, the larger the audience is, the more potent the callout will be (for better or worse).

3. *Calling Out is a Public Practice of Moral Criticism*: Calling out involves more than the assertion of a negative moral judgment, as described in the first feature. The assertion must be addressed to the person who performed the transgressive action. This is what turns the assertion of a negative moral judgment into a moral criticism.

Before looking at what calling out is *not*, I want to summarize the positive argument I make in the rest of the paper: I suggest that callouts convey a certain sort of information to the Callee. The information conveyed is about, or relevant to, the moral permissibility of the called-out action. Successful transmission and uptake of that information constitutes a sort of moral education because it helps the Callee improve morally.

A Caveat

I will make the simplifying assumption that the Caller knows she has accurately described the called-out action and has correctly identified the moral permissibility of the act-type that the called-out action instantiates. Making this simplifying assumption lets me focus on whether callouts are morally valuable and permissible even in the best-case scenario.[4] I hope the logic is clear: if calling out is morally impermissible and lacks distinct moral value even in the *ideal case,* then we may be able to settle the moral status of the practice without considering the non-ideal case.

What Calling Out Is Not

With this minimal definition, we can distinguish calling out from three other practices with which it is often confused. Calling out is not obviously incompatible with these other practices, so at the end of the Section, I'll briefly consider what it means for our analysis when a callout co-occurs with one of these other practices.

Public Shaming

To publicly shame someone is to publicly identify them as a wrongdoer, thus holding them up for public scrutiny, ridicule, and reproach. Public shaming involves implicit or explicit assertions about the *kind* of person the shamed is. This is in contrast with *guilt*, which Thomason says is focused on specific actions. When I feel guilty, I feel bad about something I did. When I

[4] I do not mean to imply that Callers always give an accurate description of the called-out action.

feel shame, I feel bad about who I am (Thomason, 2018, 11). This is one among many interpretations of what is distinctive about shame, but I think it captures how shame is invoked when callouts are derided as a practice of public shaming. Cases of public shaming are striking because the initial shamer invites the audience to render their *own* global judgment of the Callee's character solely in light of that for which she is shamed. The shamed person comes to be defined by this single dimension of her character. Especially in the social media age, calling out may be confused with public shaming if we fail to appreciate the differential scope of the judgments made in cases of public shaming versus those made when someone is called out. Calling out focuses on an instantiation of a moral transgression, so the Caller's judgment about the Callee's character is paradigmatically local, not global.

Punishment

Calling out is often framed as a punitive practice. If calling out *is* punitive, then standard accounts of punishment are of no help because standard accounts concern formal, legal punishment. If calling out is a practice of *punishment,* it is not formal or legal punishment. Linda Radzik's account of informal social punishment is well-suited to help us make sense of the notion that callouts are punitive. Radzik gives four criteria for a harm to constitute punishment.[5] The harm must be imposed in reaction to a transgression, be reprobative, be intentionally imposed, and imposed by someone with the requisite authority.[6] Those who frame calling out as

[5] It's worth noting that Radzik's criteria are derived from a definition of formal punishment. See Radzik (2019, 11 and 15)

[6] Radzik does not argue that callouts are informal social punishments. She distinguishes moral criticism from informal social punishments by noting that informal social punishments involve intentionally inflicting harm to express reprobation. In contrast, moral criticism *may*, but need not, involve intentional infliction of reprobative harm on the target of the criticism.

a punitive practice think the defining feature of calling out (understood as a punitive practice) is that the Caller *intends* to harm the Callee. On my minimal definition, a callout can satisfy Radzik's four criteria. Often, we won't be able to tell whether the Caller intended to harm the Callee. If the Caller intended to harm the Callee then, *ceteris paribus*, that would be a case of calling out and a case of informal social punishment. That these practices can co-occur does not mean they are *identical*.

Moral Grandstanding

Callouts are often derided as performative. One way this may be true is if callouts were cases of moral grandstanding. Moral grandstanding is an abuse of moral talk where the grandstander seeks to boost her moral credentials by making her peers think she is morally above-average. Moral grandstanding has two components: the grandstander desires to be recognized as morally above average, and she makes an *expression* (called the grandstanding expression) to secure that recognition (Tosi and Warmke, 2020, 15). Though the grandstander explicitly asserts a moral judgment about the moral issue she is responding to, her primary aim is to be seen by her peers as morally superior.

Like the grandstander, the Caller desires a particular sort of uptake from hearers, and she may be disappointed if she fails to secure that uptake.[7] However, the Caller seeks a different kind of uptake than the grandstander. The Caller's aim is for the Callee to improve morally. The

[7] Since there are two distinct groups of hearers for the Caller (the Callee, and the audience), the Caller may desire a sort of uptake that is appropriate for the particular hearer(s).

Caller desires uptake of the *moral* message: she wants the Callee to acknowledge the *substance* of the moral criticism.

Tosi and Warmke suggest a heuristic for identifying grandstanders.[8] If a person would be disappointed that she failed to secure uptake of the implicit message about her moral superiority, then that person was grandstanding. If we rely on that heuristic to identify cases of grandstanding, calling out will often be confused with grandstanding. The disappointment heuristic fails to distinguish the different types of disappointment that the Caller and the grandstander each feel. Where the Caller fails to secure uptake from the Callee, the Caller is disappointed that the hearers did not acknowledge or accept her moral judgment. We could say that the Caller is disappointed because the Callee did not recognize the moral superiority of the Caller's moral judgment. When described that way, callouts may count as grandstanding on the disappointment heuristic. But while grandstander is disappointed on her own behalf, whereas the Caller is disappointed on behalf of what she thinks is the moral truth.

I have not exhausted the argumentative resources for distinguishing callouts from other phenomena. I only tried to show that, on a minimal conception of calling out, we can distinguish between calling out from other, similar practices. Nothing I have said so far rules out cases where calling out co-occurs with these other practices. Before moving on, I want to briefly consider cases in which calling out co-occurs with one of these other practices.

Hybrid Cases

Informal social punishment seems most likely to co-occur with calling out. On Radzik's

[8] Though they call grandstanding an abuse of moral talk, Tosi and Warmke say the grandstander may have more laudable aims in addition to the desire for recognition.

account, one goal the punisher may have is to help the punished improve morally. By imposing a punitive harm on the punished, the punisher aims to reduce the likelihood that the punished commits a similar transgression in the future. Informal social punishment does not explicitly aim to help the Callee improve morally by sharing moral information. The aim of informal social punishment is to help the Callee improve morally by giving her reasons to avoid similar transgressive in the future. Radzik also suggests that being punished may play a role in the Callee's atonement for her moral transgressions. Punishment may also be a step in the process of the punished person's reintegration into the moral community (Radzik, 2019, 58).

The Caller may also aim to help the Callee improve morally. Thus, the goals of calling out may be compatible with the goals of punishment. Some examples of compatible goals are expressing moral disapproval, reaffirming the value of the moral norm that was violated, and decreasing the likelihood of similar moral transgressions going forward. In practice, what is required to accomplish the punisher's goals seems liable to undermine the Caller's goals. Unlike the punisher, the Caller aims to help the Callee improve morally by sharing moral information about or relevant to the moral permissibility of the called-out action. People typically react negatively to being harmed, and this natural reaction may distract from the substance of the criticism. Even if the Callee believes that she deserves to be punished, the unpleasant experience of being punished may obscure the moral information that the Caller aims to convey.

It seems *possible* for the same communicative act to count as public shaming and as calling out. However, a communicative act that is intended to both shame publicly and to call out may not be particularly successful as an instance of either practice. The goal of public shaming is to make the perceived transgressor viscerally feel the force of their community's disapproving judgment. This goal is compatible with my minimal definition of calling out. The global scope of

moral judgments in cases of public shaming seems liable to make the community write off the Callee as a lost cause. If the Callee is written off, it makes it less likely that the audience will engage with the Callee as a moral equal. Among other things, this could have the undesirable effect of making the audience more likely to subject the Callee to abuse.

Lastly, the communicative act of grandstanding and the communicative act of calling out seem to be incompatible. Grandstanders simply use another's transgression as an opportunity to burnish her own moral credentials in the eyes of her peers. In contrast, callouts are focused on the moral qualities of the Callee. Grandstanding expressions are not *about* another person's moral transgression in the way that callouts are about the called-out action. It seems difficult to craft a communicative act that accomplishes such a narrowly self-serving goal *and* disguises the narrow self-serving goal so that the Callee will be receptive to the moral criticism of the callout.

My remarks on hybrid cases have been brief. I don't have a robust sense of how the morally salient features of one practice interact with the morally salient feature of a co-occurring practice. But there are well-known objections to those other practices. In cases of co-occurrence, I am inclined to think that one practice would inherit the problems of the practice with which it co-occurs. The rest of this paper, unless otherwise stated, is about calling out in its pure, non-hybrid form. If calling out is morally impermissible in the most straightforward and best-case scenario, then it is also impermissible in hybrid cases. As such, it makes sense to consider the permissibility of the practice in the best-case scenario first.

3 An Argument for Calling Out: The Moral Education Argument

There are two benefits that calling out may have which proponents of the practice think make it a morally valuable practice. First, calling out can reinforce moral norms; and second,

calling someone out can help them improve morally. The former benefit has received more attention, most notably in Billingham and Parr (2020). They argue that practices of public moral criticism like calling out are valuable because they reinforce the importance and value of moral norms. Public moral criticism involves a practice of public accountability, which helps to secure future compliance with the moral norms being reinforced (Billingham and Parr, 2020, 7).

I think calling out can help reinforce moral norms, but I am more interested in how callouts help the Callee improve morally, which I think has been overlooked. In this Section, I will argue that calling out is a way to help the Callee improve morally because callouts can function as moral education mechanisms. The moral education function of callouts is what makes the practice uniquely morally valuable. To show this, I'll consider two views about the informational content of callouts. Then I'll present an argument for adopting the view on which callouts are items of factual testimony. I'll explain how that view of their informational content helps us fully appreciate how callouts function as moral education mechanisms. I will also explain the importance of publicity to this moral education function. Last, I consider and reply to an objection against my positive argument.

3.1 The Informational Content of Callouts: Two Views

A normative analysis of calling out depends in part on what information callouts convey. Callouts help the Callee improve morally because callouts convey morally relevant information. The Caller aims to describe the called-out action and transmit that description, along with certain morally relevant information bearing on its permissibility, to the Callee. What sort of information the Caller aims to transmit depends on which view we adopt. I'll consider two candidate views of callout's informational content, and consider on how each serves the Caller's

communicative project. On my view, the Caller's communicative project is to help the Callee improve morally. To accomplish her communicative project, the Caller seeks to do two things. First, to describe the called-out action in such a way that the Callee can see that the called-out action is an instantiation of some act-type X. There are presumably lots of ways the called-out action *could be* described, not all of which make it clear that the called-out action is an instantiation of act-type X. But as long as the called-out action is *aptly* described as an instance of act-type X, even if other people would describe it differently, then that description is a legitimate one. Second, to give the Callee information about the moral permissibility of the called-out action information about or relevant to the moral permissibility of the act-type X. Next, I will look at two views of what sort of information callouts convey, each of which accomplishes these two aims in different ways.

View 1: Moral Fact View

One way of cashing out the Caller's communicative project is that she aims to communicate moral facts to the Callee. By *moral facts,* I simply mean facts about the structure of morality or objective moral truths. Depending on your first-order moral view, the content of the facts could be the categorical imperative, or claims about prima facie duties or utility maximization. On the moral fact view, the Caller achieves her communicative aim by straightforwardly asserting two things. She asserts a description of the called-out action as an instantiation of the act-type X. And she asserts the moral proposition that acts which instantiate act-type X are morally impermissible. Consider the example from the Introduction. Gray said that "as a white person who recognizes the systemic, generations-long oppression of Native People, I can't abide by unacknowledged appropriation like this." On the moral fact view, Gray

aims to communicate two things to Hunter. First, she aims to communicate that the called-out action is an instance of the act-type 'cultural appropriation.' Second, she asserts the moral fact that cultural appropriation is morally impermissible. Gray could draw on other sorts of information as well if doing so can help her case. For instance, it seems relevant to the description of Hunter's action as an instantiation of cultural appropriation that Hunter is white. The factive nature of the second assertion does most of the heavy lifting in persuading the Callee to defer to the Caller's assertion. The reason the Caller gives for why the Callee should defer to the assertion is that it is a moral fact that acts of type X are morally wrong.

View 2: Morally Salient Information View

On this view, calling out involves doing three things. As on the moral fact view, the Caller achieves her first communicative aim by describing the called-out action as an instance of act-type X. To achieve the second communicative aim, the Caller does two things. First, she explicitly asserts certain morally salient information. Morally salient information consists of non-moral propositions which are morally relevant to the permissibility of the called-out action. Typically, the non-moral propositions are sociological, historical, psychological, or first-person experiential propositions about the consequences of acts of type X. It may be about the actual or predicted effects of the called-out action or of acts of that type. Second, the Caller *implies* that in her moral judgment, the morally salient information bears negatively on act-type X in a way that warrants an unfavorable moral conclusion about the permissibility of act-type X. For example, it is morally relevant if an action causes pain. So when she is calling someone out for that action, the Caller asserts the non-moral proposition "your action caused pain." She describes the phenomenological experiences of the pain for the pained person(s). She also implies the negative

moral judgment that this non-moral information should lead the Callee to conclude that the called-out action was impermissible.

On its own, the morally salient information is morally inert. When accompanied by the implied negative moral judgment, morally salient information can prompt the Callee to recognize the negative moral consequences of her action. Negative moral consequences include things like how the called-out action makes the Caller or others feel, that it invokes or cues certain ideological background assumptions, biases, or stereotypes, or how it may license other moral transgressions. And the implied moral judgment suggests that the called-out action is therefore morally impermissible. For instance, the Caller might assert the non-moral information that talking about "blood and soil" in conversations about immigration policy may make others more likely to discriminate against non-white immigrants. In addition to what she asserts, the Caller might also imply something like the following moral judgment: acts of the type 'discrimination against non-white immigrants' is morally wrong, and the wrongness of that act-type bears on the permissibility of the act-type that the called-out action instantiated.

In the Hunter example, Gray might accomplish her communicative aims in the following way. First, Gray shows Hunter that the called-out action can be described as an instance of the act-type 'cultural appropriation.' Second, Gray makes the explicit assertion of morally salient information, along with the implicit moral judgment that the morally salient information is evidence that the act-type which the called-out action instantiates is morally impermissible. Here, the morally salient information might be that instantiations of the act-type 'cultural appropriation' are causally implicated in perpetuating the systemic oppression of those whose culture is appropriated. The implied moral judgment would be that it is wrong to perpetuate systemic oppression. If Hunter thinks contributing to systemic, generations-long oppression is

morally wrong, then the callout should prompt Hunter to reconsider the moral permissibility of her action. In this case, Hunter agreed that cultural appropriation was morally wrong but denied that her act was an instance of it. Hunter argued that because the name "Tecumseh" was suggested by Tania (a Nuu-chah-nulth woman) and approved by the yarn dyer Candice English (whose maternal family are Blackfeet), Hunter's action was morally permissible.

On either the moral fact view or the morally salient information view, the Caller is responding to what she perceives as an information asymmetry. That is, the Caller thinks she has information that the Callee either lacked entirely or did not appreciate fully. The Caller supposes that had the Callee known or properly appreciated this information, then the Callee would not have transgressed. The nature of the asymmetry depends on our view of the informational content of callouts. On the moral fact view, the Caller knows some moral facts that the Callee does not. On the morally salient information view, the Caller knows some non-moral information that the Callee does not. Through the callout, the Caller aims to transmit whatever morally relevant information she thinks the Callee was missing. The Caller expects that having this morally relevant information will be sufficient to show the Callee why they should not act that way in the future.

The Problem with the Moral Fact View

Now that I have explained two views of informational content, I want to show why we should adopt the morally salient information view. On the moral fact view, a callout is an item of pure moral testimony (McGrath, 2009, 322). The Caller announces what she takes to be the correct moral conclusion about the type of act that the called-out action instantiated. But the moral fact view faces a problem. If callouts are items of moral testimony on this view, then any

problem for moral testimony will be a problem for the moral fact view. It is widely thought that there are issues with moral testimony and moral deference, but there are competing views of what moral testimony and moral deference are. I want to address at least one form of two of those worries, though they may not be the most serious objections to moral testimony.

The first problem if callouts are items of moral testimony is epistemic. There is little agreement about whether moral testimony can convey moral knowledge *at all*. One objection to moral testimony that may pose a problem for the moral fact view is that moral testimony can convey propositional knowledge but not moral understanding. Even if moral testimony can convey some sort of moral knowledge, some people still doubt that this could be sufficient for moral improvement. Call the view that moral testimony cannot transmit moral understanding *moderate pessimism*. According to moderate pessimism, callouts educate the Callee by transmitting propositional knowledge about moral matters. Consider the moral proposition "I ought to be kind to others." If I have propositional knowledge of this proposition, then I know *that* I ought to act in a certain way, namely in the kind way. I may even be able to give reasons *why* I ought to act this way: kindness maximizes happiness, conduces to treating people as ends in themselves, or is what guides the virtuous person. But my propositional knowledge that I ought to be kind is not *actionable*. On its own, propositional knowledge can't tell me how to be kind or even what to look for to determine what the kind action is in a particular case. To know how to act on the moral proposition, I need to understand it. In this way, moral understanding is more like a skill or capacity (Hills, 2013, 555). To understand this moral proposition means that I have a sense of what it means to be kind, and what features kind actions tend to have. It may also involve my developing a sensitivity towards how considerations of kindness interact with other pieces of moral knowledge.

Moderate pessimists can agree that calling out can transmit propositional knowledge in a way that counts as moral education but deny that calling out serves a valuable function (Crisp, 2014, 133). If callouts are limited to conveying knowledge of moral propositions, this suggests that the Callee will have difficulty responding productively to the criticism (Hills, 2013, 555). Without the additional information that comes with understanding, it is difficult for the Callee to identify the negative moral features of the called-out action in a way that may help guide her in other situations.

The second problem for the moral fact view is that even if moral testimony can convey moral knowledge, many philosophers argue it would be problematic for the Callee to accept the Caller's moral testimony. Deference to moral testimony might be problematic for several reasons. On most views of moral facts, everyone has equal access to moral facts (Bailey, 2017, 879). Given that everyone has the same level of access to moral facts, accepting the Caller's moral testimony is impermissible because the Callee would be outsourcing the work of moral inquiry. The process of moral inquiry is valuable in itself, not just as a means to holding the right moral beliefs. Thus, by outsourcing that work the Callee does herself a disservice (McGrath, 2009, 322).

The picture is more complicated on the morally salient information view, but also more promising. The literal content asserted in a callout consists of non-moral propositions. This means that callouts are not what McGrath calls *pure* moral testimony, and therefore callouts are not items of moral testimony at all. Unlike on the moral fact view, the Caller only *explicitly* asserts the non-moral propositions. Her moral judgment about the bearing of the non-moral propositions on the permissibility acts of type X is *implied*. In a sense, the Caller suggests that the Callee draw a particular conclusion from the non-moral propositions, but the Callee is

ultimately left to draw her own moral conclusions. As I've described it, the morally salient information view has three advantages over the moral fact view.

First, on the morally salient information view, callouts are items of *factual* testimony. Unlike moral testimony, we think factual testimony can convey knowledge, and that deference to factual testimony is unproblematic. Moreover, it is possible for the Caller to have better access to the sort of morally salient information which she explicitly asserts (Bailey, 2017, 879). For instance, suppose the Callee used a racial slur. If the Caller is a member of the group targeted by the slur, and the Callee is not, then the Caller is better positioned to access morally salient information about the effects of that slur for a member of the group it targets. Since the Callee is not a member of the group targeted by the slur, she *cannot* access that information directly (Thomas, 1998, 364).[9] Alternatively, the Caller may just happen to be better positioned than the Callee to access the morally salient information directly. For example, the Caller is better positioned than the Callee to directly access morally salient information about what it is like to be unhoused if the Caller happens to be unhoused. Since the Callee could *also* end up unhoused, it is possible for the Callee to access that morally salient information directly. Here, the barriers to direct access are a matter of the Callee's circumstances.[10] The morally salient information view also avoids the second issue that I said faces moral testimony. It is uncontroversial that some people are better positioned than others to access certain non-moral facts directly (see

[9] Even if the Callee were to pose as a member of the targeted group, her experience hearing the slur is qualitatively different than the Caller's experience. She hasn't lived her entire life as a member of the targeted group. And knowing that she can stop posing as a member of the targeted group at any time means that she is not forced to reckon with the slur, or the bigotry the slur represents, as long-term problems.

[10] The Callee may or may not be culpable for these barriers (or for failing to break them down). I'm not interested in questions about culpable or non-culpable ignorance here, though I acknowledge that if the Callee is culpably ignorant this may have practical implications for the Caller.

Thomas, 1998, and McGrath, 2009). As such, we regard deference to factual testimony as unproblematic. Because callouts are items of factual testimony, rather than moral testimony when we adopt the morally salient information view, there is nothing problematic when the Callee defers to the Caller.

Of course, this is not the whole story of either view. The moral fact view may have redeeming features which I've omitted, and the morally salient information view may have problems that I've neglected. But the morally salient information view lets us avoid the problems facing the moral fact view. This suggests that we should reject the moral fact view in favor of the morally salient information view.

Callouts as Moral Education Mechanisms

If what I have said above is right, and we adopt the morally salient information view, then we are in a good position to describe how callouts serve as moral education mechanisms. The basic idea is that by conveying morally salient information, the Caller gives the Callee reasons why the Callee should judge that the called-out action was morally impermissible. When successful, moral education begets moral improvement. To say that callouts educate the Callee is to say that the Caller provides the Callee with a resource (morally salient information) which helps the Callee to be more moral in some respect. Here are two kinds of moral improvement that callouts might beget when a callout succeeds in morally educating the Callee. Moral education may result in transformative moral growth at the level of the Callee's character. In this case, when calling out works then the Callee becomes a different *sort* of person. She doesn't become a moral saint. Rather, the Callee transforms into someone who sees the moral world

differently than she did before being called out.[11] Alternatively, moral education may cause the Callee to recalibrate particular moral judgments. The scope of revisions is aggressively local. Rather than a moral overhaul, the Callee revises particular moral judgments about the called-out action. She may make adjustments to her deliberative process, perhaps by giving greater weight to a feature which the Caller suggested deserved greater deliberative weight.

It is hard to imagine how calling out *as currently practiced* could – by itself – prompt the sort of pervasive character improvement involved in transformative moral growth. The Callee may trust the Caller enough to revise some of her local moral judgments. But callouts are paradigmatically one-shot interactions and occur between strangers; the lack of trust between the Caller and Callee could be a barrier to the Callee seeking out more global moral growth. A callout may *contribute to* the sort of deeper self-interrogation that precipitates wholesale character transformation. But whether callouts can prompt that sort of transformation on their own is an open question that must be settled empirically. It may also be unfair to expect broader moral growth given that morally salient tends to be more particular to the situation. Broader moral growth might require the Callee to take the particular information and generalize it before she can apply her new knowledge more widely. Prior to the callout, the Callee either lacked or failed to appreciate this new morally salient information. As such, it might be too much to expect that the Callee will have the capabilities to generalize and apply the morally salient information that way, at least right off the bat.

Callouts prompt the Callee to recalibrate certain moral judgments which are closely related to her judgment about the permissibility of the called-out action. On my view, calling out

[11] The particular details of what moral transformation entails will depend on one's first-order moral view, so I don't go into specifics here.

has limited efficacy.[12] The fact that calling out involves factual rather than moral testimony helps explain why this is the case. If callouts only convey propositional non-moral knowledge, then there are limits to what the Caller may reasonably expect from the Callee in the wake of the callout. If she expects her callout will precipitate a moral transformation in the Callee, that is unfair to the Callee. For this expectation to be reasonable, the Caller would have to take on additional obligations to the Callee. Namely, the Caller bears some responsibility for putting the Callee in a position to develop a richer appreciation of the called-out action's morally significant features (Thomas, 1993, 93). This suggests another reason for preferring the morally salient information view to the moral fact view. On the morally salient information view, callouts may convey richer information, and more of it. By asserting the non-moral propositions and implying a certain moral judgment about that information, the Caller aims to draw the Callee's attention to those morally significant features of the called-out action in virtue of which she judges it to be morally wrong. Suppose the called-out action has caused certain people to suffer unnecessarily. A report about that suffering that is sufficiently descriptively rich will tend to illustrate better why acts that cause suffering are morally impermissible (Thomas, 1998, 378). Moreover, the Callee may find those descriptions of the suffering more compelling reasons to revise certain moral judgments than the reasons she would get from a straightforward moral proposition.

Despite the limited efficacy of callouts, the practice of calling out has uniquely valuable benefits. The unique power is a function of the public nature of calling out. There are at least two ways that the publicity feature is important to my positive argument. First, because callouts are public, audience members play a role in lending credibility to the Caller's assertion. Second, the

[12] There is always the possibility that the Callee will take the callout as an opportunity for additional moral introspection and will end up experiencing moral transformation. But in general, the best we can expect is to prompt a local change or revision to the Callee's relevant moral judgments.

public nature of calling out is what makes it possible for Callers to engage in moral criticism *at all*. For now, I'll focus on the first reason. I am not the first to key in on the importance of publicity to the moral value of calling out. I noted earlier that Billingham and Parr also think publicity is valuable. But publicity plays a slightly different role on my view than it does on Billingham and Parr's view. There are at least two ways the publicity of callouts can contribute to their efficacy as moral education mechanisms. The more people who contribute morally salient information that supports the Caller's initial moral judgment, the harder it is for the Callee to dismiss the callout or deny that it merits serious consideration. The Caller may inspire audience members to contribute their own morally salient information. This could be their own experiences of being directly targeted by the called-out action, the problematic origins of the ideologies or stereotypes cued, or their own process of moral growth which led them to reject acts of type X. By enriching the pool of morally salient information for the Callee to consider, the audience aids the process of moral education by painting a richer picture of the moral considerations that bear on the moral permissibility of the called-out action.[13]

Once we appreciate that callouts are limited in this way, we can explain why calling out may feel futile. On my view, it sometimes *is* futile. Calling out will be ineffective as a mechanism of moral education when the Callee is a dispositional bigot. Callouts may be less effective if the Caller and Callee have an antecedent disagreement about which act-types are morally impermissible. If the Callee disagrees with the Caller that acts of type-X are morally impermissible, then the Caller needs to convince the Callee that acts of type-X are morally impermissible before she could accomplish the two communicative aims of calling out.

[13] I am unsure if the audience member's contributions would be *callouts* in their own right (they certainly *could* be), but anecdotal evidence suggests that a common response from audience members is to contribute their own factual testimony.

Sometimes it will be possible for the Caller to do this. But if the Callee is dispositionally bigoted, it is unlikely that the Caller will convince the Callee that acts of type-X are morally impermissible. Failing to convince the Callee of that makes it unlikely that the Caller will convince the Callee that the called-out action was morally impermissible. The Caller's justification for judging that the called-out action is morally impermissible is that the called-out action instantiates a morally impermissible act-type. If the Callee disagrees that acts of that type are morally impermissible, they will not agree that instantiations of that act-type are also morally impermissible. This means that callouts are unlikely to succeed as moral education mechanisms when the Callee is dispositionally bigoted since the dispositional bigot will not be receptive to morally salient information since she has already decided that acts of type X are morally impermissible.

Contrary to portrayals of calling out as an antagonistic practice, or one that reveals the Caller's disdain for the Callee, calling someone out is an *optimistic* act. When calling out is a means of moral education, like I have suggested, we will only call people out if we think they *can* improve morally. Far from writing the Callee off as a lost cause, the Caller who aims to help the Callee improve morally must think that the Callee is (or could be) receptive to considering new, morally salient information in a good-faith way.

Objection to the Moral Education Argument

Next, I'll consider an objection to the moral education argument. This objection comes from the literature on blame. The objection is that the Caller must (but rarely does) meet certain criteria to have standing to call out. To have standing to call out means that one can legitimately

occupy, and is recognized as legitimately occupying, the role of Caller.[14] On standard accounts of standing, if someone lacked standing to call out, but did so anyway, then that callout was morally inappropriate. When a callout is morally inappropriate, standard accounts say the Callee is entitled to reject the substance of the callout *pro forma* (Bell, 2013, 264).[15]

There are different things in virtue of which one might have standing to call out. I'll look at two conditions on standing that critics of calling out may suggest Callers typically lack. On the first condition, standing requires the Caller was harmed by the called-out action. On the second condition, standing requires the Caller have access to certain information about the Callee. In response to the harm-based standing condition, I'll argue that when the called-out action violates a moral norm, anyone who is *also* subject to that norm will have standing even if they were not harmed. In response to the epistemological standing condition, I'll argue that information about the Callee's reasons, intentions, and motivations is not essential to the moral permissibility of calling out.

Some suggest that having standing requires that the Caller is harmed by the called-out action. What counts as being harmed by the called-out action is difficult to pin down. But unless we take a highly expansive view of what counts as being harmed, Callers typically do not fulfill this harm-based standing condition because they were not clearly harmed. Critics of calling out might favor a harm-based standing condition because it should reduce the frequency of calling

[14] In the case of calling out, we might think that in addition to standing to publicly morally criticize via callout, Callers must have standing to perform whatever other functions callouts perform, e.g., the Caller must also have standing to morally educate. Whether or not additional standings are necessary to legitimate a callout probably depends on the relationship between the minimal definition of calling out and the functions that callouts – understood in the minimal way – can perform.

[15] The focus is on the moral (im)propriety of criticizing when the critic lacks standing, rather than on the (in)felicitousness of criticism when the critic lacks standing. I am not sufficiently familiar with literature on standing, so I want to flag that some authors may indeed view standing as a felicity condition.

out. This condition will limit the pool of eligible Callers to those whom the Callee harmed. It would also eliminate the practice of callouts for so-called victimless moral transgressions. If there is uncertainty about who was harmed or what counts as being harmed in a particular case, the burden is presumably on the potential Caller to show that she meets the harm-based standing condition.

Standing could also be a function of the Caller and Callee's relationship.[16] McKeirnan suggests an epistemic condition for standing, on which the Caller's relationship to the Callee must permit the Caller epistemic access to certain information about the Callee. McKeirnan suggests that the relationship needn't be *personal*. Still, there is a certain level of familiarity (if not intimacy) that seems necessary for insight into what kind of person the Callee is.[17] I call this information about what kind of person the Callee is *contextual information*. Contextual information includes things like the intent behind and reasons for the called-out action, as well as relevant facts about the Callee's character (McKeirnan, 2016, 146).

Suppose a newscaster says "Young Black men have historically been violent." If she meant to say "violent," that is importantly different than if she *actually* meant to say "violated." The appropriate response if she intended to say "violent" may be inappropriate if she just got tongue-tied trying to say "violated." Given an epistemic condition for standing like McKeirnan's, only people who have a relationship that allows them epistemic access to contextual information

[16]Although I'll be talking about calling out, I want to explicitly flag that McKeirnan is not.

[17]McKeirnan's thinking is a scholarly gloss on a common objection raised against callouts by non-philosophers. Oftentimes, a Callee (or her supporters) will respond that because the Caller and audience doesn't know the Callee's heart, they don't have the right to accuse the Callee of malintent. For a recent example of this kind of defense, see New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees' statement responding to outrage at his comments on people who don't stand for the national anthem: https://www.prnewsonline.com/drew-brees-fumbles-statement-creates-pr-nightmare-for-nfl/.

about the newscaster have standing to call her out. Depending on the sort of relationship necessary for epistemic access, this group likely includes her friends, family, and colleagues. It may include people to whom she has no personal relationship but frequently interacts with, like the barista she chats with every morning while getting coffee.

There is something intuitively attractive about this epistemic standing condition. At the very least, having contextual information seems practically useful for the Caller, who could use it to improve the chance her callout will succeed. There are other reasons that critics of calling out should like this condition. Calling out is paradigmatically practiced between strangers. And in general, the Caller and Callee won't have the sort of relationship that will satisfy this epistemic standing condition (Seim, 2019, 20). This epistemological condition for standing would reduce the frequency of callouts by limiting the pool of eligible Callers to those with the right sort of relationship to the Callee. But since the Caller has access to contextual information, there might be a corresponding rise in the success rate of calling out.

I'll give two reasons for thinking that Callers have standing, at least on the views of standing discussed here. In response to the harm-based standing condition, I'll argue that if the Callee violated a universal moral norm, anyone who is also subject to that norm has standing to criticize others who violate it – regardless of whether they were harmed. And in response to the epistemic standing condition, I'll suggest that contextual information doesn't bear on whether calling out is permissible or advisable.

To respond to the harm-based standing condition, we can turn to Macalaster Bell's argument that standing conditions only apply when certain types of moral norms are violated.[18] Bell suggests that standard accounts of standing are problematic because they don't distinguish

[18] This is the argument that McKeirnan responds to in McKeirnan (2016).

between different types of norms. On standard accounts, the requirements for standing to call out are the same whether one is calling out a violation of a universal moral norm or a violation of a relationship-specific moral norm. For Bell, this leads to implausible results. For instance, on a typical harm-based standing condition, I will lack standing to call out the perpetrator of racially motivated violence if I was not harmed. If we had a slightly more permissive definition of "harm," a standard account could say that I lack standing if I am not a member of the group targeted by the violence.

Bell suggests the following remedy: we should distinguish violations of universal moral norms from violations of relationship-specific moral norms. Criticizing violations of relationship-specific moral norms requires standing, whereas criticizing violations of universal moral norms does not. Bell thinks we can treat these kinds of norms differently because the former sort of norm only applies to certain people. A relationship-specific moral norm applies only to those in a particular relationship. Relationships are partly constituted by certain norms, and some of those norms are unique to that relationship.[19] Relationship-specific moral norms govern what we owe to one another in virtue of standing in a particular relationship to each other (Bell, 2013, 277). Consider the following example from Bell: suppose Aramis and Blaise hold each other to certain standards of artistic integrity. It is appropriate for Aramis and Blaise to hold each other to standards of artistic integrity because their relationship is partly constituted by a norm about artistic excellence. But it might be inappropriate for a third person, Cam, to hold Blaise responsible for failing to maintain her artistic integrity (Bell, 2013, 277).

In contrast, universal moral norms are norms to which we are all subject. They govern

[19] By "unique" I mean that the norm governs only the parties to the relationship. Multiple different relationships could be partly structured by the same relationship-specific moral norms, but the relationship specific moral norm governing a friendship between A and B does not govern how A or B treats C or D even if C and D's friendship is partly constituted by the same relationship-specific moral norm that partly constitutes A and B's friendship,

what we owe to each other as persons, regardless of what relationship we have to them. For instance, Aramis can hold Blaise responsible for Blaise groping Cam because Blaise violated a universal moral norm against unwanted sexual touching (Bell, 2013, 280). Bell thinks we are in a position to hold responsible people who violate universal moral norms because the moral climate of our community depends on the behavior of each member (Bell, 2013, 271). A moral community where moral transgressions proliferate is not a desirable community, intrinsically or instrumentally. Even if the Caller is not *harmed*, she has an interest in how her community responds to violations of universal moral norms when those violations degrade the moral conditions.[20]

In response to McKeirnan's epistemic standing condition, I suggest that contextual information typically isn't necessary for the callout to perform the morally valuable function of helping the Callee improve morally. As long as it is possible to describe and judge the called-out action without reference to the contextual information about the Callee, then it is possible for the Caller to achieve her communicative aim. To see how this is possible, consider the following example:

> Alex asks Carlin the following question: "are your locs supposed to look messy, or are you just lazy?" In response, Carlin calls Alex out, saying: "that question is based in racist stereotypes, and perpetuating racist stereotypes perpetuates racial inequality."

If Alex did not mean to cue or perpetuate a racist stereotype, her question was unintentionally racist. If Alex *did* mean to cue that racist stereotype, her question was *intentionally* racist. If Carlin meets McKeirnan's epistemic standing condition, then she will be able to assess whether

[20] Moreover, being strict about harm as a condition on standing may mean it would be morally impermissible for the allies of those who were harmed to call out because the allies would lack standing. This shifts the burden of callouts fully onto those who were harmed by the called-out action, which seems patently undesirable.

Alex's question was racist intentionally or unintentionally. But if she does not meet that condition, then Carlin is not entitled to assert that Alex's action instantiated the act-type 'intentionally racist action.' To be entitled to assert that Alex's action instantiated the act-type 'intentionally racist action,' Carlin would need access to contextual information about Alex that allowed her to assess Alex's intentions. But even if Carlin lacks access to contextual information, Carlin can fairly say that Alex's action instantiated the act-type 'racist action.' Under a description that is neutral with respect to Alex's intent, a callout can still play a role in moral education because some morally salient information bears on the moral permissibility of Alex's action whether or not it was intentionally racist. For instance, it seems appropriate in both cases for Carlin to share morally salient information about the ideological roots of the stereotype that locs are unhygienic.[21] If Alex was intentionally racist, the callout might give Alex reasons to reject that stereotype.[22] If Alex was unintentionally racist, the callout might help Alex see why the question was, in fact, racist. So callouts can function to morally educate even when the Caller lacks access to contextual information about the Callee.

Given this, the epistemic standing condition should be unnecessary as long as it is possible to describe and categorize the called-out action without reference to intent.[23] However, one might

[21] Alex may be a dispositional bigot. In that case, it might be appropriate to at least try to get her to care about relevant morally salient information even if it's often futile. After all, you never know until you try!

[22] It might seem like if Alex was intentionally racist, then Alex is a dispositional bigot, and so calling Alex out would be futile. It seems possible to me that Alex could be intentionally racist without being a dispositional bigot, which is why I discuss the case where Alex was intentionally racist. If I am wrong, and one cannot be intentionally racist without *also* being a dispositional bigot, then there are two things we could say: (1) we could say that it is pointless or in some way inappropriate to call Alex out because doing so would be futile. Or we might say (2) there is still some value to be had by calling out dispositional bigots like Alex.

[23] Or at least, this is the case on the assumption that the Callee is concerned to avoid moral transgressions and she agrees that instantiations of the act-type referenced by the Caller are moral transgressions.

think that though moral education can be appropriate even in cases of ignorance or lack of ill-intent, criticism is *not* appropriate. If it is inappropriate to criticize people for moral transgressions committed in ignorance or without ill-intent, then calling out would also be inappropriate. And if calling out is inappropriate in those cases, then it seems like we should want something like McKeirnan's epistemic standing condition in place.

In response to that worry, proponents of calling out can point out that it's not always plausible that the Callee was non-culpably ignorant of the moral implications of the called-out action. For instance, it seems highly unlikely that Alex could grow up completely unaware of the existence of racism, or of why acts that instantiate the act-type 'racist action' are morally wrong. Some people will suggest that Alex is culpable for failing to educate herself about racism and investigating her own biases adequately. I am sympathetic to this line of thinking, but there is a more modest argument for why criticism may still be appropriate in cases of ignorance or lack of ill-intent. On that modest argument, someone may be liable to criticism for their action without necessarily being culpable.[24] Even if we can tell a reasonable story that explains *how* Alex remained ignorant of the racist implications of her question, Alex may still be liable to criticism because she remained ignorant. With respect to certain moral norms, it seems unlikely *as a matter of fact* that someone could remain ignorant of the fact that there are such norms unless she was motivated to remain ignorant. Barring the rare case where the Callee has never before encountered the norm in question but not by her own design, the Callee is liable to criticism if

[24] One thing that may complicate this line of argument is if we are in what Cheshire Calhoun calls an "abnormal moral context." In an abnormal moral context, only a fraction of the community has a certain piece of moral knowledge (Calhoun uses the example of first-wave feminists) and this moral knowledge hasn't been disseminated broadly enough for us to be justified in saying that if someone is still ignorant of first-wave feminism, then they must have tried to remain ignorant. Whether we are in a normal or abnormal moral context depends on the moral issue we're concerned with. If we are in an abnormal moral context, where the Caller is on the cutting edge of morality, then the argument I've given here may not work as well.

she is (or should have been) aware of the norm but failed to appreciate that she is governed by it, or to understand what it gave her reason to do in a particular case.

McKeirnan is right that those who meet the epistemic standing condition may be better positioned to secure uptake from the Callee than those who don't meet the condition. The Callee may trust people she knows more than strangers. Or someone who meets the epistemic standing condition may have a better sense for how to get the Callee to see the moral stakes. Practical considerations such as these are worth thinking about. But it is a mistake to think these practical considerations constitute normative standards for permissibility (Bell, 2013, 272).

In this Section, I aimed to give a positive account of how calling out functions to morally educate the Callee, using resources from the literature on moral testimony. I argued that issues of standing are avoidable on my view. Next, I'll present a stand-alone argument *against* the moral permissibility of calling out.

4 Argument Against Calling Out: Disproportionately Harmful

The harms of callouts can be manifold, multi-faceted, and far-reaching. Even the most hardline proponent of callouts cannot seriously deny this. In this Section I will advance an argument, which I later reject, on behalf of critics of calling out. Critics of calling out may argue that even if I am right about their benefits, the harms of calling out to the Callee render the practice morally impermissible. In the literature — popular and philosophical — devoted to criticisms of practices of public moral criticism (which includes calling out), people have keyed in on two recipients of potential harm. The first recipient is the Callee. In addition to the usual harms associated with being the target of criticism, callouts expose the Callee to certain other harms. By announcing that she has transgressed, the Caller makes the Callee liable to certain

kinds of reactions from audience members, some of which may be harmful to her. Second, some critics hold that the moral community itself is a recipient of potential harm. They argue that the moral community is indirectly harmed by calling out because it is a practice that tends to silence certain kinds of speech and discourage certain actions (e.g., Tosi and Warmke, 2020). Since there is already a robust dialogue about how public moral criticism may harm the moral community, I will focus on presenting an argument that the harms to the Callee mean that the practice of calling out morally impermissible.[25]

No case better illustrates the potential harms of calling out than that of Justine Sacco. Sacco's viral infamy began when she tweeted "Going to Africa. Hope I don't get AIDS. Just kidding. I'm white!" before boarding an 11-hour flight (Ronson, 2015). By one account, tens of thousands of people had retweeted or commented by the time Sacco landed. Reactions varied dramatically (Ronson, 2015). Of those who reacted to Sacco's tweet, some people responded by calling Sacco out.[26] Sacco's life changed dramatically in the wake of the reaction to the tweet. She was fired, ostracized by her family; she became known worldwide as 'that woman who joked about AIDS.'

Callouts can cause a wide variety of harms: psychological, financial, reputational, and social. They can be mild, severe, or – as in Sacco's case – life-changing. Some of the more severe harms include threats to physical safety, being doxxed or stalked, receiving threats to

[25] See *Grandstanding* by Justin Tosi and Brandon Warmke for an example. I think their argument can be refuted, but they make a strong case so others may disagree.

[26] I would have loved to use an actual example of a reply to Sacco's tweet here. Because Sacco secured the services of a highly sophisticated online reputation management company (pro bono, after Ronson wrote about her experience), I have been unable to find examples of responses to Sacco's tweet either in news reports or actual tweets archived in the open-access Wayback Machine. But my understanding from secondary sources is that at least some of the many responses to Sacco's tweet fit my definition of a callout.

themselves or their loved ones, and being fired (Adkins, 2019, 84). The Callee may experience debilitating physical or psychological effects. Her social standing may be diminished in professional and personal circles, and she may find herself ostracized or shunned. Some harms of being called out will be familiar even to people who haven't been called out – for instance, the discomfort of being told that what we did was wrong or immoral.

Exposing the Callee to these sorts of harms might make calling out a morally objectionable practice for several reasons. I will present an argument that says calling out is morally objectionable when the harms to the Callee are generally disproportionate to the severity of the called-out action. This argument was inspired by a remark in Radzik (2019). There, Radzik says that if informal social punishment centrally involves or inevitably leads to disproportionate harms for the punished, that is sufficient to reject that practice on moral grounds. Critics of calling out can argue that the same is true for calling out. If calling out inherently or inevitably leads to disproportionate harms for the Callee, that may be sufficient grounds to reject the practice of calling out. To be clear, the argument I'm presenting on behalf of critics of calling out is *not* that any *particular* callout is morally odious if it causes the Callee disproportionate harms or vice versa. I am presenting a more modest claim on behalf of the critic: if calling out inherently or regularly exposes the Callee to disproportionate harms, and we can't reduce the risk of exposure, then there is a strong case for thinking that the practice of calling out is not morally valuable.

For many critics, calling out is objectionable *because* it happens in public*,* and not because it is a practice of moral criticism. The critic argues that because callouts are public, this practice is uniquely likely to cause disproportionate harm to the Callee. Even if the criticism is warranted, and even if the Callee's transgression has made her liable to some harms, the critic of

calling out argues that the public nature of calling out changes the magnitude of harms for the Callee. I will look at three ways that this might happen: (1) harms may be magnified, (2) harms may be replicated, and (3) new kinds of harms become possible. This list is not meant to be exhaustive; there may be other ways that the public nature of calling out could change the magnitude of the harms to the Callee. The harms to the Callee may be disproportionate in one, some, or all of these ways.

I'll use the following example to illustrate the three ways that the public nature of callouts can result in disproportionate harm to the Callee:

> Afia lives in the European countryside during WWII rationing. She stops by the butcher to pick up meat. There is a long line, and while helping Cary, a hotelier, who is in front of Anna in line, Beryl the Butcher announces to those still waiting that the only thing left for sale is offal. Afia is aware Cary is cheating the ration system by falsifying hotel records to make it seem like they have more people to feed than are staying in the hotel. With the fake guests' ration cards, plus those of their actual guests, Cary circumvents the rules to buy more meat than they'd be entitled to purchase. Afia calls Cary out for gaming the system.[27]

Magnification[28]

Cary might feel more or less the same sort of feelings whether she was privately criticized or publicly called out: humiliated or ashamed of being caught, upset at being criticized, or she's failed to be sufficiently patriotic. The audience's presence, and her awareness of their presence, may magnify her feelings, making them more intense. It can be distinctly distressing to experience strong emotions, especially strong negative emotions, in front of others. It does not need to be the case that anyone is actually watching the Callee; it is enough that the Callee *thinks*

[27] This example is based on a scene from an episode of the BBC show George Foyle's War.

[28] Aitchison and Meckled-Garcia (2021) discuss the ampliative effect of publicity. They combine what I am calling "magnification" and "replication" under the header of "aggregate public effect." See Aitchison and Meckled-Garcia (2021), especially page 5.

that the audience is observing her. Psychological and social harms seem most liable to magnification, since all that is required for magnification is the presence of the audience. In general, the larger the audience, the greater the magnification of the harms. In this way, the Caller exposes the Callee to the possibility of harms that are disproportionate to the severity of the transgression just because she called her out rather than privately criticizing her.

Replication

When someone is called out, they are exposed to the audience as someone who committed a moral transgression. The audience may also play an active role in making the harms disproportionate by replicating the harms. To replicate the harm of the original callout is to repeat, restate or make a new contribution to the moral criticisms directed at the Callee. This may involve repeating what the Caller said, or they may endorse or reiterate the substance of the Caller's moral criticism. The original callout makes possible and licenses the audience's replicative acts. By replicating the original callout and its harms, the audience members can add to the overall burden of harm for the Callee. With each replication of the original callout, the audience gives the Callee another moral criticism that demands uptake. Some critics refer to this as "piling on." Piling on describes cases where the audience members agree with, endorse, or reiterate the Caller's moral judgment but don't contribute anything new to the conversation (Tosi and Warmke, 2020, 45). Piling on is considered morally worse than replication that involves audience members making unique contributions to the dialogue.

Once the audience reaches a certain size, the individual replications may count as an aggregated harm distinct from, and not reducible to, the sum of the individual replications (Aitchison and Meckled-Garcia, 2021, 5). The original callout and individual audience

contributions might be benign when considered in isolation. But when the Callee is the target of dozens or hundreds of moral criticisms, each of which is unobjectionable on its own, the initial callout that prompted subsequent criticisms may be objectionable because of the sheer volume of criticisms contributed by the audience.

Possibility of New Types of Harms

Some harms that the Callee may experience from being called out may only arise because of the public nature of calling out. The public nature of calling out makes harms like doxxing, organized campaigns inundating the Callee with threats, and stalking possible. These harms are so objectionable that any practice which reliably resulted in those sorts of harms would be difficult to justify. There is plausibly no moral transgression so severe such that harms like these would be proportionate. But the public nature of callouts means those sorts of harms can become live possibilities. There are several reasons for this. We may be psychologically prone to feeling emboldened by crowds and even encouraged to act badly. Or perhaps it's just a numbers game: the larger the audience, the more likely it is that any particular person will be willing and able to inflict certain harms. This issue is particularly acute when callouts occur online. The perverse incentives of social media algorithms, low barriers to access, and anonymity incentivize more extreme behavior. And as the size of the audience increases, so too does the risk that an audience member will have the wherewithal and the disposition to harm the Callee.

Upshot

Even if we think that the Callee makes herself liable to some harms in virtue of her moral transgression, the Caller wrongs the Callee when she exposes her to disproportionately severe

harms because. This is because, as Radzik points out, the Callee can only make herself liable to *proportional* harms. The onus is on the Caller to be aware that the public nature of calling out increases the risk that she exposes the Callee to the risk of disproportionate harms. More to the point, the Caller must be cognizant of the connection between audience-size and the likelihood that the Callee will be exposed to disproportionately severe harms (Tosi and Warmke, 2020, 45-50). Proponents of calling out must explain how to defuse the worries expressed here by giving an account of calling out that includes a way to assess the severity of the Callee's moral transgression and what would be proportional in terms of harms. That account must also tell us what, if any, responsibility the Caller bears for minimizing the risk of disproportionate harm to the Callee.

Reply

Sacco's story has reached canonical status among critics of callouts. But this is a mistake. Stories like hers are taken to be paradigms of the practice simply because they are more familiar. But we are familiar with these cases *because* they are remarkable. Such cases are remarkable because the Callee experiences harms that are grossly disproportionate relative to the severity of the called-out action. Given how the practice is represented in the public conscience, we could be forgiven for thinking that callouts always, or often, end in severely disproportionate harms to the Callee. What receives less attention is that some of the most infamous Callees have rebuilt their lives despite what they went through. For instance, within a year of that tweet, Sacco had received multiple job offers in her field (ironically, public relations) and had mostly rebuilt her

private life.[29] Sacco's story is not dispositive, but her experience suggests there is life after being called out. Her story is a reminder that we need to look at the practice of calling out as a whole rather than just the *exceptional* cases.

There is a dearth of empirical work on calling out, so we can't draw conclusions about whether, how, and to what extent Callees are harmed in mundane cases. Nor are we entitled to say that cases like Sacco's are a rarity. But anecdotally, we can note that our experiences seem to social media posts don't frequently go viral the way Sacco's tweet did. And if reputational restoration, emotional recovery, and social reintegration are possible in the most severe cases, then those things should also be possible for the Callee in the aftermath of more mundane callouts.

Because of its public nature, calling out involves exposing the Callee to the risk of disproportionate harm. These risks are serious and should be treated as such. But I want to argue that this argument is not fatal to proponents of calling out. The critic who raises the above argument against calling out is right that proponents of calling out need to provide an account of calling out that includes a way to identify, assess, and mitigate the risk of harm to the Callee. Public moral criticism is an old practice, of which calling out is a more recent iteration. Because it is a relatively new practice, the fact that proponents don't have a reply to the argument that I presented in this Section shouldn't surprise us.

Still, the critical argument presented in this Section puts serious pressure on proponents to give an account of calling out that acknowledges the risk of disproportionate harm to the Callee and suggests best practices to reduce that risk. If we learn that calling out often harms the

[29] Sacco had some advantages that might make her story atypical: she was a well-educated white woman with the means to spend time volunteering rather than seeking a new job and the knowledge she had acquired from working in public relations.

Callee in disproportionate ways as an empirical fact, then the pressure to give such an account will be even greater. But at the very least, it is too early to conclude that proponents of calling out *cannot* develop a way to identify, assess, and mitigate the risk of disproportionate harm to the Callee.

In this Section, I advanced an argument that the critic of calling out could make, on which calling out is morally impermissible because calling out disproportionately harms the Callee. I suggested that the proponent of calling out should concede that critics may be correct about the harm to the Callee, but I denied that this is a serious worry for proponents of calling out. I think the critic is right to demand an account of calling out that includes a set of best practices for avoiding disproportionately harming the Callee. But I also said that we shouldn't be concerned that proponents of calling out haven't offered such an account of calling out. I hope to have shown that the moral status of calling out is complex. Next, I will conclude by suggesting that calling out is morally valuable because it has unique benefits that are hard to replicate, given certain contingent features of our social reality.

5 Conclusion

I want to close by revisiting the role I envision for callouts in order to explain their distinct value and their advantages as a practice of moral criticism. As a reminder, I started this project with the idea that the practice of calling out has been unfairly maligned. Until now, the debate on the moral permissibility of this practice has been beset by confusion about the target phenomena. Different thinkers burden the concept with different sorts of baggage. I started with what I take to be the bare minimum features of calling out. I defined calling out as a practice of moral criticism involving the public communication of a negative moral judgment to the person

who committed a particular act that was held to violate moral norms. I argued that calling out is a morally valuable practice because callouts serve as a valuable moral education mechanism. I presented, and ultimately rejected, a critical argument that calling out is morally impermissible because it exposes the Callee to disproportionate harm.

I've argued that calling out is both morally permissible and the source of unique moral value. To conclude my argument that calling out has unique moral value, I'll address the second way that publicity is important to my positive account. Some people think that a world where criticism is privately communicated would be preferable to a world where calling out is morally permissible. But want to suggest that the public nature of calling out is what makes it possible for Callers to engage in moral criticism *at all*. Some people have proposed an alternative practice of criticism, which is referred to as calling in. Calling in is the private analog to calling out. But if we say that only calling in is permissible, then most moral criticisms that would have been made as callouts won't be made at all. To see this, suppose we said that moral criticism was only permissible when communicated in private. Then it would be a prerequisite for a permissible criticism that the criticizer can communicate privately with the object of their criticism. One predictable consequence of this is that calling out will only be permissible if the Callee is someone we know.

We are, as a society, less likely to form relationships with people who are different from us. Those who are relatively privileged may not even recognize that their lives are constrained in this way, or that their complacent insularity can have profoundly unjust consequences for others. I don't mean to suggest that privilege is static or that someone may be privileged in one respect but not in others. Privilege is complex and dynamic, as are the ways that the intersections of different identities relate to a particular person's privilege. But for the relatively less privileged,

the complacent inattention or ignorance of others can have life or death consequences. Calling out is a way for people in that latter group, or their allies, to communicate important morally salient information to people in the former group.

In fact, we seem to *prefer* to stay in our ideological comfort zones (Bailey, 2017, 880). Even in a less-polarized social and political climate, people naturally gravitate toward those with a similar worldview. In the social media age, the results of this are called echo chambers or filter bubbles. But people try to create similar ideological boundaries offline as well. Think of white flight, redlining, or barring trans people from using the bathroom or locker room that aligns with their gender identity. Again, these phenomena are complex, and are not just examples of privileged people cultivating an ideological comfort zone by excluding or avoiding people who aren't like them. The people we know who can privately criticize us likely have access to morally salient information that is similar to what we can access. Sometimes people 'like us will have access to new morally salient information because they sought it out or have been called out themselves. The morally salient information we get from people like us will often reinforce our initial belief that our action was morally permissible. The possibility of moral improvement requires breaking out of the echo chamber by finding (or being confronted with) new morally salient information held by people who see things differently than we do. Whether intentional or accidental, many of us fail to appreciate what life is like for people who aren't like us. This is especially true of those who are relatively privileged in a given society. Because it is public, calling out is a means by which people who would often be ignored or overlooked – particularly by those with relatively more privilege – can grab the attention of people who are otherwise socially and ideologically insulated from the negative consequences of their actions on others. Thus, the kind of moral education involved in calling out is especially impactful when the Caller

and Callee wouldn't otherwise interact.

Contingent features of our social reality make it difficult to acquire new morally salient information unless we actively seek it out. And the majority of would-be-Callers have no alternative mechanism for communicating with the target of their moral criticism. By providing a way for us to morally criticize people we cannot speak to privately, callouts challenge the notion that privilege and power can shield people from the consequences of their actions. Because they function as moral education mechanisms, callouts play a role in mitigating culpable and non-culpable ignorance of important morally salient information. No practice of private moral criticism can match the reach that calling out has in virtue of its publicity. If we think sharing morally salient information with others is a valuable practice, we should be very reticent to accept that moral criticism must be private. And practices like public shaming or informal social punishment don't seem well-positioned to replicate the moral education function that I have argued makes calling out a uniquely valuable practice.

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